

Message Text

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ACTION EA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 NSAE-00 NSCE-00 SSO-00

USIE-00 INRE-00 PM-03 H-02 INR-07 L-02 NSC-05 PA-01

PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 OMB-01 AID-05 IO-10 /065 W

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O R 121001Z APR 75

FM AMEMBASSY SAIGON

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 5235

INFO CINCPAC HONOLULU HI

USDEL JEC PARIS

C O N F I D E N T I A L SAIGON 4861

EO 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINS PINT VS

SUBJECT: VIETNAMESE REACTION TO PRESIDENT FORD'S ADDRESS ON US
FOREIGN RELATIONS

1. SUMMARY. VIETNAMESE REACTION TO PRES FORD'S ADDRESS GENERALLY FAVORABLE AND SAGGING VIETNAMESE MORALE BOOSTED BY REQUEST FOR SUBSTANTIAL MILITARY AID AND EMPHASIS ON SPECIAL OBLIGATION US HAS TOWARD VIETNAM. HOWEVER, NUMBER RANKING OFFICIALS EXPRESSED VIEW THA

ADDRESS NOT STRONG ENOUGH. OTHERS WHO NURTURED HOPE OF US MILITARY INTERVENTION TO HALT OFFENSIVE WERE DISAPPOINTED THAT SPEECH DID NOT GO FAR ENOUGH. END SUMMARY.

2. IMMEDIATE IMPACT OF PRES FORD'S ADDRESS ON VIETNAMESE PEOPLE HAS BEEN GENERALLY FAVORABLE. NUMBER ACADEMICIANS AND CIVIL SERVANTS IN SAIGON EXPRESSED VIEW THAT ADDRESS WAS "SUPPORTIVE" AND MAJOR BOOST TO SAGGING MORALE OF VN PEOPLE AND ARMED FORCES. ADDITIONALLY, AS PRES FORD WAS UNKNOWN QUANTITY FOR MANY VIETNAMESE, ADDRESS SERVED TO REEMPHASIZE FACT AMERICAN PRESIDENT STILL BELIEVES US HAS SPECIAL OBLIGATION TO ASSIST SOUTH VIETNAM. FEW OFFICIALS HOWEVER BELIEVE CONGRESS WILL APPROVE PRES FORD'S PROPOSALS IN THEIR ENTIRETY AND SOME THINK NORTH VIETNAM TAKEOVER BY MILITARY OR POLITICAL MEANS MERELY MATTER OF TIME. OTHER VIETNAMESE WHO
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NORMALLY FOLLOW AMERICAN AFFAIRS CLOSELY OR THOSE WHO STILL

NURTURE HOPE THAT DIRECT US MILITARY FORCE WILL BE USED TO HALT OFFENSIVE, REACTED TO SPEECH WITH BITTERNESS AND DISAPPOINTMENT.

3. ADVANCE NOTICE AND CONSIDERABLE SPECULATION CONCERNING ADDRESS WERE CARRIED IN ALL SAIGON DAILIES IN RECENT DAYS AND MANY VIETNAMESE REPORTED LISTENING TO ADDRESS WHICH WAS BROADCAST HERE IN ENGLISH. ALL SAIGON DAILIES CARRIED BANNER HEADLINES WHICH TENDED EMPHASIZE EMERGENCY NATURE OF PROPOSAL AND FACT PRES CALLED ON HANOI TO HALT MILITARY ACTIVITY IN SVN. RADIO AND TV STATIONS CARRIED EXCERPTS OF ADDRESS AND FAVORABLE COMMENTARY ON EVENT AT FREQUENT INTERVALS THROUGHOUT DAY AND EVENING OF APR 10.

4. AT A NEWS CONFERENCE HELD AT GVN PRESS CENTER FOLLOWING ADDRESS, GOVT SPOKESMAN SAID: "THE RVN PEOPLE AND ARMED FORCES WERE VERY ELATED OVER THE REAFFIRMATION OF US COMMITMENTS AIMED AT ASSISTING THE RVN'S STRUGGLE AGAINST THE NORTH VIETNAMESE COMMUNIST AGGRESSORS. ONCE AGAIN, THESE COMMITMENTS PROVE CONTINUITY OF US GOVT'S POLICY TOWARD VIETNAM ISSUE WHICH HAS BEEN AFFIRMED BY FIVE SUCCESSIVE PRESIDENTS AND 12 SESSIONS OF US CONGRESS OVER 20 YEARS. TO RVN PEOPLE AND ARMED FORCES, WHO ARE FACING A DIFFICULT AND EXTREMELY SERIOUS SITUATION, THESE COMMITMENTS AND ASSISTANCE ENCOURAGE THEM TO PERSIST IN STRUGGLE FOR THEIR OWN SURVIVAL AND TO PROTECT AND BUILD A LIFE CONSISTENT WITH THEIR DESIRES FOR PEACE AND FREEDOM."

5. VIETNAMESE WHO REACTED FAVORABLY TO ADDRESS GENERALLY STRESSED FACT THAT PRES FORD EMPHASIZED SPECIAL US/VIETNAMESE RELATIONSHIP AND ALSO SPECIAL OBLIGATION OF US TOWARD VIETNAM, CALLED ON HANOI TO CEASE MILITARY ACTIVITY IMMEDIATELY, AND SENT DIPLOMATIC NOTES TO SOVIET UNION AND PRC. MOST IMPORTANT ITEM IN SPEECH, ACCORDING TO NUMBER EMBASSY CONTACTS, WAS AMOUNT OF AID REQUESTED AND FACT IT WAS "MILITARY" AID. CITING RECENT SPECULATION THAT REQUEST WOULD BE FOR HUMANITARIAN AID ONLY, EMBASSY CONTACTS EXPRESSED PLEASANT SURPRISE AT AMOUNT REQUESTED AND TIME LIMIT SET BY PRES FOR CONGRESSIONAL DEBATE WHICH THEY BELIEVE TO EMPHASIZE URGENCY OF CURRENT SITUATION IN SVN. HIGH RANKING ARMY OFFICER SAID: "AT LEAST PRES SUPPORTS US AND EVEN THAT WILL GIVE STRONG BOOST TO OUR MORALE." HE ALSO DECLARED THAT HE WAS IMPRESSED WITH SENSE OF URGENCY WHICH PRESIDENT'S SPEECH REFLECTED AND SAID "TIME IS AS CRITICAL AS SUPPLIES THEMSELVES." CONFIDENTIAL

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6. SMALL BUT INFLUENTIAL NUMBER VIETNAMESE WASHINGTON WATCHERS COMPLAINED TO US THAT ADDRESS NOT STRONG ENOUGH AND/OR TIME FOR TALKING LONG PAST. ONE SENIOR GVN OFFICIAL SAID "SINGLE B-52 STRIKE WOULD DO MORE FOR MORALE OF VIETNAMESE THAN ALL FANCY WORDS." CONTENDING THAT HE BELIEVED COMMUNISTS ARE CAREFULLY WATCHING SITUATION AND ARE POISED TO EXPLOIT IT MILITARILY, SAME OFFICIAL EMPHASIZED THAT NEXT FEW DAYS WOULD

BE CRITICAL PERIOD FOR SVN. HE NOTED THAT INCREASING NUMBER
GVN OFFICIALS AND INTELLECTUALS SLOWLY ACCEPTING REALITY THAT
US SUPPORT WILL NOT BE FORTHCOMING AND DEMISE FOR RVN SIMPLY
MATTER OF TIME.

7. SENIOR VIETNAMESE ADVISOR TO AAFLI SAID HE THOUGHT PRES "DID ABOUT
THE
BEST HE COULD UNDER THE CIRCUMSTANCES AND THAT BASICALLY IT WAS
A GOOD SPEECH," BUT ADDED THAT PRES FORD HAD TALKED ABOUT POS-
SIBILITY OF EVACUATING LARGE NUMBER OF REFUGEES" AND "SOME
VIETNAMESE WILL INTERPRET THIS AS SIGN THAT US HAS GIVEN UP ON
SOUTH VIETNAM." SAME OFFICIAL NOTED THAT "ONE MISSING ELEMENT
IN SPEECH, THE THING MOST VIETNAMESE WERE WAITING FOR PRES FORD
TO SAY, WAS A THREAT TO THE NORTH VIETNAMESE OF MILITARY INTER-
VENTION." ON BALANCE THOUGH, AAFLI OFFICIAL BELIEVE VIETNAMESE
WOULD BE ENCOURAGED BY ADDRESS BUT DISCOURAGED THAT SPEECH DID
NOT GO FAR ENOUGH.
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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: GOVERNMENT REACTIONS, SPEECHES
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 12 APR 1975
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: buchandr
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1975SAIGON04861
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D750128-0485
From: SAIGON
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1975/newtext/t19750455/aaaabzdc.tel
Line Count: 133
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION EA
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 3
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: n/a
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: buchandr
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 20 MAY 2003
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <20 MAY 2003 by BoyleJA>; APPROVED <06 OCT 2003 by buchandr>
Review Markings:

Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
05 JUL 2006

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: VIETNAMESE REACTION TO PRESIDENT FORD'S ADDRESS ON US FOREIGN RELATIONS
TAGS: PFOR, VS, (FORD, GERALD R)
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 05 JUL 2006